2 Leadership Questions and the Escalation of Deviant Subculture in Nigeria

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Introduction

The controversial emergence and surge of deviant subcultures in Nigeria is deeply rooted in a sustained problems revolving around leadership failure and multiple layers of crises in both the state and national levels of governance. More often, poor leadership, which is further aggravated by the widespread of corruption, a lack of accountability, poor institutional structure as well as ineffective policy implementation and enforcement, has provided grounds for the emergence and sustenance of deviant subcultures, which consequently intensify social instability and insecurity across the country (Adeniran, 2018, Udo, 2022, Adekunle & Alokpa, 2023).

The Nigeria's leadership dilemma is related to the inability of political elites to create a governance structure of inclusivity, which is substantial enough in confronting the deeply rooted socio-economic inequalities. Consequently, this inadequacy has created a vacuum for deviant groups of varied non-conformist tendencies, such as cult groups, terrorists, and those involved in organized crime to thrive. Such groups therefore often provide as an alternative societal structures and identities to marginalized and disfranchised youths (Arogbofa, 2022, Ososona, 2022, Duyile, 2023). These deviant sub-groups usually oppose conformity with societal norms prevalent in most environments, thus experiencing increased rates of violence and crime responsible for maintaining societal malfunction as well as hindering national progress (Schoenhoefer, 2017).

Additionally, the inherent systems of patronages existing in Nigeria's leadership sustain deviant tendencies with allegiance-based orientation instead of qualification, and this fosters impunity among offenders (Duyile, 2023). Institutional weakness of this sort sabotages power-holding institutions, such as law-enforcing agencies and courts of law, therefore frustrating vital efforts towards mitigating deviant behaviour. As such, neighborhoods become ever-more vulnerable to the impacts of such subcultures, as is the case with the occurrence of ritualistic crimes, youth gangs, and intra-communal conflicts (Comfort et al., 2013, Oarhe, & Aghedo, 2010, Ezemenaka, 2021, Yusuf, 2025a).

Existing scholarship have identified the value of transformational leadership as essential element in fostering good governance, pursuing social justice, empowering youth, with a cumulative effect of decreasing incidences of deviant behaviour (Lawal et al., 2012, Sharon et al., 2016, Egbeji, 2019, Ughulu, 2024). As such, upgrading organizational capacity-building as well as enabling active engagement among stakeholders is a crucial method towards eliminating such deviant subcultures, thereby setting the groundwork towards sustained peace and national development. The need to address the core leadership deficiencies and foster a culture of integrity and inclusivity is imperative in enabling Nigeria to effectively grapple with its current societal problems and achieve sustained stability and progress. Against this background, this paper strives to contribute towards the existing discussion with a systematic exploration of leadership failures in reference to deviant subculture emergence. In addition, it suggests governance-based initiatives designed at supporting national security and promoting developmental goals at the same time.

Failures in Leadership and entrenchment of Deviant Subcultures
The prevalence of leadership failure at both local and national levels is central in understanding the birth and persistence of deviant subcultures in Nigeria. These subcultures, including cultism, banditry, substance abuse, and youth gangs, usually find fertile ground in environments characterized by inefficient leadership, compromised authority, or malfunctioning governance. Deviant's subculture thrives in the convergence of weak administrative institutions, exclusionary political processes, and failing institutions that has resulted in generating environments favorable to the development of alternative power structures and competing social systems (Blackman, 2014, Onyeizugbe et al., 2021). At local levels, effective leadership is essential in maintaining societal order, inculcating core values, and deterring deviant behaviour. However, religious, traditional, or community leadership failure in supplying moral direction, enforcing societal values, or meaningful engagement with youth grievance creates huge leadership vacuum. Deviant groups usually fill this void with offers of identity, membership, as well as material benefits to susceptible young individuals. Leadership failure in resonating with youth, in managing unemployment issues, or in reducing the magnetism of crime widens prevailing problems.

Similarly, at the national or macro level, leadership dysfunction is evident in the widespread prevalence of corruption, policy incongruities, and poorly developed institutions. Inadequate execution of core governmental responsibilities such as education, security, and employment further aggravate desperation among the youth, compelling them towards unfavorable behavioural predispositions (Okolie, & Igbini, 2020). This disconnection between the masses and those in power fosters mistrust and dilutes state authority, thus paving the way for non-state actor groups as well as criminal subcultures to grow in power. Furthermore, Nigerian political leadership is often inclined towards ignoring structural injustice and marginalization. An elitist, patron-client-based, ethno-religious partisan politics has

kept large swaths of people outside of national development processes, with devastating consequences such as a divided society in which some of these people resort to deviance as a means of resistance or survival (Nnonyelu, 2013, Aluko, 2002). As a result, deviant groups in such settings tend to mirror the roles of institutions, with social care or pecuniary benefits, thus solidifying themselves in specific groups.

Meanwhile, Nigerian security is weakened through leadership lapses. Cases of police brutality, extortion, and engagement in crime dent citizens' confidence and discourage community interaction with law enforcement agencies (Abalaka, 2024, Yusuf, 2025b). In effect, this reinforces an unregulated sphere in which deviant sub-cultures can operate with impunity, in some cases superseding state authority in the settlement of domestic conflicts as well as administering justice. Therefore, leadership failure as a causative agent in deviance can only be tackled effectively with an integrated multi-level approach. At the base, strengthening of local governance structures with a push towards principled leadership can build normative standards. At the national scale, leadership reform with accountability, inclusivity, and youth development as focal points is necessary. In addition, measures need to work towards rebuilding citizens' confidence in state institutions with transparency as well as fairness in governance (Okolie, & Igbini, 2020).

Legitimacy, Effective leadership, and susceptibility to Deviant Behaviour
The Perceptions of young people about leadership's legitimacy and effectiveness significantly influence their civic behaviour and susceptibility to deviant tendencies. In Nigeria today, there is growing disillusionment with leadership in political, religious, and social institutions among young people, a feeling that has significantly contributed to rising deviant tendencies. This phenomenon is indicative of a larger crisis of confidence in leadership, because leadership is seen as self-centered, fraudulent, and thereby disconnected with everyday realities of most Nigerians.

Studies reveal that a large percentage of Nigerian youth think both national and local leadership is weak in addressing socio-economic problems such as unemployment, inferior quality of learning, and insecurity (Okolie, & Igbini, 2020, Okechukwu, & Nwekwo, 2020). These unfulfilled hopes create sentiments of exclusion and despair. For many, particularly those in urban poverty neighborhoods and deprived rural towns, subcultures offer several points of attachment, security, and mobility that traditional leadership has failed to provide

Furthermore, youth engagement with leadership is often shaped by historical experiences of exclusion and betrayal. For instance, The EndSARS protests of 2020 demonstrated the extent of youth frustration with state institutions, especially the police, and underscored their perception of leadership as oppressive rather than protective (Aleyomi, 2020, Ugwueze, 2024). In environments in which leadership legitimacy is questioned, youths are less likely to conform to societal norms

promoted by such leadership. Instead, they may align themselves with deviant identities that challenge or undermine the dominant social order.

This erosion of trust also extends to religious and traditional institutions. Previously seen as beacons of morality, these institutions are now increasingly seen as being compromised in some way by political power or as being unable to promote the well-being of youth (Adelson, 2017). As a result, large populations of youths step aside from established systems of values and become receptive to ideologies peddled by deviant networks, such as radicalism, cybercrime, and cultism. In addition, studies reveal that the judgment of leadership effectiveness among youth is shaped by both media depictions and peer relationships. The ascendancy of dirty leaders who go unpunished promotes a culture of impunity, such that pursuing deviant tendencies might have higher returns than pursuing integrity (Adebisi, 2018). Whereas social media is the conduit of activism, it is at the same time the medium of glamorizing fraud, violence, and revolt, thus further reducing deference towards leadership standards.

To address these perceptions, leaders should bridge the trust gap by introducing inclusive governance and reforms that target the youth. Drivers of legitimacy can be achieved by involving the youths in decision making, meaningful economic opportunities, and accountability of the public officials. Moreover, civic education and mentorship initiatives are vital to divert the energies of the youth on deviance towards positive social behaviour (Manuwa, 2023). Also, the ineffective or illegitimate view of leadership in the mind of the Nigerian youths is one of the things that make them most vulnerable to deviant subcultures in the country and until there are urgent reforms that will give credibility and inclusivity in leadership, the efforts in curbing deviance among the young will be futile.

Institutional Leadership, Governance Structures and Deviant Subcultures
The rise of deviant subcultures in Nigeria is primarily attributed to failing institutions and inefficient governance. Inefficient leadership in institutions, as typified by a lack of transparency and lack of coordination, coupled with leadership failure, engenders environments under which deviant groups can easily capitalize. In many parts of Nigeria, failure in institutions of police, judiciary, schools, and local councils has considerably weakened societal order, leading to widespread deviant behaviour such as banditry, cultism, kidnapping, and cybercrime (Oarhe, & Aghedo, 2010, Abokwara, 2021).

Another failure is in the minimal efforts towards crime fighting using law enforcement agencies and court judiciaries. When police institutions appear biased or corrupt, and when court processes become slow or tainted, faith in conventional systems of justice decreases. In such a situation, citizens will take justice into their hands or live in alternative modes, especially when such measures present them with greater security and greater economic advantages. In some regions in the North-West

and in some regions in the South-East, one can witness an official state withdrawal in such a way that armed groups claim control of regions, and separatist groups occupy some regions (Harnischfeger, 2003, Akuul, 2011, Aleyomi, 2020).

More so, the educational institutions also have shown a noticeable failure in inculcating resilience against unhealthy behaviour. Inadequate financial means, inefficient management practices, and deficient leadership capacity have made several public schools to lack adequate infrastructure in teaching moral and civic values effectively to students (Olaleye et al., 2021). This weakness does not only facilitate increased levels of school dropout rates but also propels pupils towards unhealthy groups of peers who promote illicit behaviour. For example, cult groups have been known to prosper in schools with inefficient or politically driven systems of discipline and leadership.

Besides, the inefficient governance is one of the major enabling conditions of deviancy. For instance, if there is a lack of governmental provision or provision failure, especially in marginalized groups, people tend to view the state as unimportant. In such a situation, deviant groups act as realistic substitutes for economic opportunities, justice, and sometimes social care. As such, those involved in internet scam, locally known as 'Yahoo Boys,' can acquire social status in a place in which traditional means of advancement are blocked or unreliable. Additionally, geographical variations exacerbate the discrepancies with regards to diffusions of deviant subcultures. In case of Niger Delta, environmental degradation combined with perceptions of state agency lapses has driven some youth towards militant activity. Also, in the North-East, institutional weakness allowed Boko Haram to rise since those services normally provided by the state were provided instead by this group (Ojo, 2020). These patterns demonstrate how widespread institutional lapses present structural opportunities for deviant subculture emergence.

To this end, efforts towards reducing deviant behaviour ought to focus on strengthening institutions. This entails the promotion of police professionalism, the rebuilding of court systems, improvement of educational systems in schools, and restoring people's faith in governance. An effective institutional structure with a focus on accountability and with people's needs at its core can serve as deterrence against being lured into deviance. Institutional fragility combined with governance failure has provided a fertile ground for deviant subcultures in Nigeria. Without any universal reforms aimed at creating institutional legitimacy, deviancy will likely endure as a workable means of survival as well as a means of expression among disempowered groups.

Corruption and Law Enforcement Agencies response to Deviant Subcultural activities

Corruption among national and local leadership institutions significantly hampers the responsiveness of law enforcement institutions in dealing with abnormal subcultural trends in Nigeria. It undermines professionalism, perpetuates impunity, adds operational demands, and thereby dilutes organizational capacities in dealing with crime and social disorders. In a national context, widespread corruption disables the setting of strategic policies and resource allocation in the security architecture. In similar vein, budgetary resources aimed at police recruitment, training, and equipment allocation end up among the political elites or senior administrators, leaving frontline police officers poorly equipped and demoralized (Osasona, 2020, Balogun, 2023). Such inability disables law enforcement institutions in dealing with deviant groups such as bandits, cultists, and insurgents with increasingly higher levels of impunity.

Ultimately, the widespread corruption in local leadership exacerbates the current crisis as community leaders and local governmental officers routinely aid deviant organizations in exchange for pecuniary or political gains. In some cases, local politicians will recruit the aid of cult groups or armed youths during election periods, overtime legitimizing the activity of these groups and assuring their continuance. These efforts compromise law enforcement agencies as neutral bodies and thwart genuine community policing initiatives. In addition, the Nigerian Police Force has been consistently characterized as an organization suffering with corruption. Activities such as extortion, bribes, and random release of detainees in exchange for financial incentives have critically damaged citizens' confidence in the process. As long as citizens view justice as being subject to financial manipulation or influence, cooperation with law enforcers will dwindle, as a result leaving enough room for deviant groups to thrive. (Ogele, et al., 2020, Ebiede, & Nyiayaana, 2022, Balogun, 2023)

The consequences of this malfunction triggered by corruption have been the widespread tolerance of deviant behaviour in many Nigerian societies. People involved in cybercrime, drugs, and cultism freely flaunt their wealth, power, and immunity, with clear partnership sometimes of existing corruptions in state agencies. These blatant displays not only glorify deviant practices but also discredit efforts towards inculcating civic values and lawful behaviour among adolescent Nigerians. One of the most important consequences of this failure is the greater distance between law-enforcing agencies and the citizens they have obligations towards. Citizens grow to view police officers not as protectors but as predators, and this perception fuels further deviance. For example, the #EndSARS protest in 2020 shows police brutality and corruption, therefore igniting large-scale civil unrests and depletion of citizens' confidence in law-enforcing institutions (Aleyomi, 2020, Ugwueze, 2024).

Therefore, it is essential to put in place effective anti-corruption structures that place emphasis on both political agents and the law enforcement agency. This includes strengthening institutions of oversight such as the Police Service Commission, engaging civil society in police behaviour monitoring, as well as encouragement of transparent financial practices in security institutions (Osasona, 2020). In addition, police officers need improved welfare policies together with adequate training as means of controlling aberrant behaviour and fostering moral behaviour. In summary, corruption at both state and local levels critically undermines Nigeria's ability to combat deviant subcultures. Without addressing the deep-seated culture of impunity and corruption, police practitioners stand little chance of enjoying meaningful results, with deviance existing as a competing social order.

Deviant Behaviours Management among the Significant Others
Family, religious, and community authorities were identified as the significant others. They play central roles in determining youth's behaviour and setting societal standards. In Nigeria, these institutions have traditionally played moral leadership roles as well as those of cultural brokerages. Nevertheless, with a characteristic surge in deviant behaviour among Nigerian youths in the form of membership in cults, cybercrime, ritual killings, and substance abuse, the efficacy of these authorities has been subjected to increased scrutiny. These institutions have the potential of being bulwarks against moral decadence or, on the other hand, breeders of deviance by default, collusion, or ill-guidance (Ruwan et al., 2020).

The family is the primary agency of socialization. Parents and guardians are expected to transmit discipline, values, and settled norms of behaviour. However, economic crisis, rural-to-urban migration, and erosion of parental authority have compromised this traditional role. many families now suffer instead from absentee parenting, household violence, or moral permissiveness, any of which increases vulnerability of adolescents to wayward subcultures. In contexts in which child supervision is lacking, peer pressure is often in ascendancy with a resultant normalization of such behaviour as substance abuse and cultism. (Fawole, et al., 2020, Ezemenaka, 2021)

Religious institutions, with immense moral and spiritual authority, rank among institutions that can guide as well as imbue societal values. These institutions have been central in many rehabilitation efforts as well as youth mentorship programs (Ruwan et al., 2020). However, it is now increasingly challenging to justify such religious institutions with some clerics being materialistic in orientation and politically involved. Over-emphasis on prosperity preaching as well as miracle commercialization has diverted focus away from moral values in pursuit of wealth, inadvertently endorsing some of the root causes of youth deviance, such as cyber fraud and ritualism (Nwaka, 2020a Uroko, 2023).

In the same vein, community leaders, especially traditional rulers, are also pivotal in youth guidance and communal governance. In many rural and peri-urban areas, they are the custodians of culture and have the authority to sanction or rehabilitate offenders. However, political cooptation, corruption, and declining influence have reduced their effectiveness. Some community leaders turn a blind eye to deviant behaviour when such actors are politically connected or financially influential, thereby legitimizing deviance through silence.

Moreover, in some cases, powerful community members contribute towards aggravating deviance as they recruit youngsters towards issues of political violence, issues related to lands, or other localized issues. During elections, young individuals are mostly mobilized as thugs, thus aggravating further their involvement in deviant networks. These endeavors not only promote crime but create a dependency cycle in return with deviant behaviour resulting in economic as well as political benefits. (Dorff, et al., 2020, Ebiede, & Nyiayaana, 2022)

There are, however, models of initiatives that have positive results. Religious outreach programs for youths, strengthening of families, as well as peace forums in neighborhoods have proved worth in reducing deviant behaviour, as long as leadership is ethically driven. Programs such as 'Faith for Change' in Northern Nigeria have shown the potential of religious as well as community leadership in countering terrorism while at the same time contributing towards social reconstruction (Nwaka, 2020b, Ishaku et al., 2021). In conclusion, religious, community, and parental leadership can act as promoters as well as preventers of deviancy among Nigerian youths. Their effect is immense; however, it depends on a desire to act with integrity, values, justice, as well as empowerment of youths. Sustainable institutions of this kind, along with increased consultation with governmental institutions, present vital ingredients in maintaining initiatives towards reducing deviant behaviour.

Political instability, Leadership crises Youth involvement in Deviant Acts

Political instability and leadership crises have played a huge part in fueling increased involvement in deviant behaviour, especially concerning cultism, gang violence, and militancy. Leadership instability is one prominent feature of Nigeria's socio-political phenomenon realized in such themes as corruption in diverse ways, electoral violence, ethnic conflicts, and unrest in governance. These processes have fostered an atmosphere of uncertainty as well as disillusionment such that deviant subcultures have proved highly appealing in chiefly younger demographics (Fagbadebo, 2007, Oke et al., 2024).

Political instability is often followed by economic backwardness, disrupted learning, and increased insecurity. These problems fall most acutely on the youth, who make up most of Nigeria's population. If state leadership is unable to create employment opportunities, ensure security in public spaces, or promote meaningful civil activity,

it inadvertently pushes many of its youth towards deviancy as a means of coping or as expression of resistance In such environments, cultism and gang violence often present opportunities for asserting power, identity, and membership in a world in which rightful paths towards success have been blocked. (Ezemenaka, 2021, Oke et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, electoral violence is one of the most substantial determinants of unscrupulous behaviour among young people. Politicians have attempted in the past to mobilize unemployed or aggrieved youths as powerful actors and compelling them to enter some organized crime groups. These groups endure long after election periods; and they sometimes morph into gangs or cults responsible for extortion, territorial control, and armed conflicts. As they solidify power, they go on to recruit more vulnerable youths, and continuing a continuous trajectory of violence. Leadership crises, whether due to contested elections, impeachment threats, or executive-legislative standoffs, often shift government focus away from youth policy implementation and social reform. Consequently, investment in education, mental health, youth empowerment, and skill development is deprioritized. This neglect leaves many young people disenfranchised and makes them easy targets for deviant recruitment (Olowojolu, et al., 2019, Gadau, & Malami, 2022).

Furthermore, when youths observe national leaders engaging in corruption, tribal favoritism, or disregard for rule of law, it sends a dangerous message. It normalizes deviance at the top and implicitly justifies deviant behaviour among the lower strata of society. As a result, youths may begin to see cultism or fraud not as crime, but as practical responses to systemic injustice (Ezemenaka, 2021). Additionally, insecurity widens the existing crisis; for instance, in Zamfara, Borno, and Imo states, state-level leadership problems have disrupted local governance, allowing armed groups to dominate. Easy access to arms, inefficient policing, and population displacement have driven many young men into armed groups due to survival needs as well as the hopes of rising in social standing (Vambe, 2016).

To mitigate these consequences, Nigeria must stabilize its politics and focus on youth development as part of its national security agenda. Ensuring accountability in a democratic setup, promoting transparent governance, as well as facilitating proactive leadership, can help restore the confidence of youth. In addition, peacebuilding initiatives, civic education, and electoral reform, can help detach youth from networks of violent political patronage. As earlier mentioned, political instability and leadership crises escalate youth deviance by creating environments of insecurity, exclusion, and hopelessness. Therefore, a stable, transparent, and inclusive political system is not only a governance ideal but also a preventive strategy against the growth of deviant subcultures.

Leadership Strategies, Public Policies and Management of Deviant Subcultures in Nigeria

Addressing abnormal subcultures in Nigeria requires distinct leadership strategies and clear-cut public policies designed at addressing the root sources of social deviance. Even with the existence of diverse policies at both national and sub-national levels, including those of empowering youths and crime control strategies, their impact has been limited due to deficient execution, partisan interference, and weakness in perpetuating them in the long term

Subcultural groups involved in cultism, cybercrime, drug use, and terrorism, among other vices, have mostly been shaped by structural socio-economic inequalities, exclusionary politics, as and disorientation in culture. However, modern leadership tactics have tended towards reactive solutions, such as military action and fleeting law enforcement, as opposed to preventives For example, as projects such as National Youth Policy 2019-2023 create employment opportunities and educational opportunities, execution of such projects faces several obstacles such as corruption, dearth of resources, and non-intervention of meaningful numbers of youths in policy-making processes (Adedeji, 2022, Duyile, 2023, Oke, & Ahoton, 2024).

More so, the lack of consistency in leadership degrades policy implementation effectiveness substantially. Successive governments pay no attention to past efforts at youths or societal development, thus creating discontinuity and a lack of strategic planning. Programs such as N-Power and the Youth Investment Fund feature prominently in electoral campaigns; they, however, lack adequate monitoring and evaluation structures essential in determining their actual contribution to the behaviour of youths (Ogunmodede et al., 2020). In addition, policymakers' disconnection with policy beneficiaries prevents knowledge transfer, thereby reducing the policies' relevance as many youth's view interventions by the government as being elitist or unapproachable, as such registering lower levels of engagement and rising disillusionment.

Unfortunately, the Nigeria's top-down leadership programs lack any sort of input coming from constituents of lower levels of governance and these policies fail to tackle true situation and hopes of youths in such targeted regions. Another issue is related to a lack of leadership in blending religious and traditional institutions with formal policies dealing with deviant behaviour. Religious organizations and traditional community authorities have long played a vital role in moral orientation and social control (Adebisi, 2018, Olu-Owolabi et al., 2024); however, current policies tend to leave such institutions outside of any integrated framework. This scenario is one of several obstacles facing outreach efforts while at the same time reducing opportunities for long-term behavioural change. Despite these obstacles, there have been some small positive successes. For example, efforts at integrating citizenship studies and life skills in some state secondary schools have shown promise in raising resilience against peer pressure and deviant behaviour. In

addition, efforts at community-based policing as well as peacebuilding forums, at least among youth in Kaduna and Lagos state, have hinted at localized, ground-up efforts being potentially more successful than top-down, bureaucratic initiatives.

Therefore, to enhance efficiency, the leadership in Nigeria needs to change its reactive approaches to more proactive ones that have an emphasis on early intervention, involvement and interaction with the community and inter-agency coordination. The creation of the public policy must be based on data (fact-based), participatory, and validated on a regular basis. Also, the youth should not be engaged in a tokenistic fashion, they should be allowed full participation in decision-making, program design, and implementation of policies.   Although the methods of leadership and the public policies have endeavored to alleviate the circumstances leading to deviant subcultures, there is still little effectiveness as the policies have faults inherent in governance, policy consistency, and participation. Strengthening institutional integrity and building partnerships with civil society, youth organizations, and local leadership structures will be key to more effective responses.

Leadership Reforms for Curbing the spread of Deviant Subcultures in Nigeria
To stem the threat of deviant subcultures in Nigeria, there is a need for comprehensive leadership reform at grassroots and national levels. Leadership reform at all levels should focus primarily on transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness in response to socio-economic triggers of deviant behaviour. The reform becomes essential and without such changes in leadership conceptualization and operationalization, efforts at controlling deviance will be mere superficial

At the community level, there is a need to rebalance local authorities, traditional leadership, and religious leaders in a framework of participatory governance. Community leadership is often the first contact point of vulnerable youth groups. However, many local leaders have no adequate training, means, or acknowledged authority necessary for successful intervention. Reforms need to include training of local leadership in youth work, conflict management, and in the delivery of social interventions. More so, the decentralization of civil service authorities such as schools, youth centers, and professional training schemes, can bring intervention closer to the communities most affected by deviance. Adedeji, 2022, Duyile, 2023, Oke, & Ahoton, 2024

Moreover, at the national level, leadership reform needs to prioritize integrity in public office, merit-based appointments, and policymaking and implementation aimed at citizens' needs. A long-standing problem in Nigeria's leadership sphere is appointing unqualified or politically motivated individuals in prime youth development agencies. Strengthening leadership institutions such as the National Orientation Agency and National Youth Council of Nigeria with transparent processes and performance-based evaluations can bolster greater credibility and

effectiveness. The reforms also should be focused on promoting political accountability as it is necessary that leaders account for the diversion of funds raised for youths and for deploying youths for political thuggery. Furthermore, there is need for reforms in electoral systems, such as putting in place campaign expenditure limits and prosecuting political violence becomes essential in cutting youth's attachment with questionable patronage systems.

Importantly, leadership reform needs to be followed by a change of culture. Nigerians have a tendency towards celebrating status and wealth no matter how acquired, in effect celebrating deviancy. National leadership needs to lead moral examples, extol moral values in celebrating integrity, and champion ethics in conducting affairs. Also, the communication through media channels, schoolbooks, and religious messages, must convey the lesson of moral excellence and dedication to the community. Another thing that is vital is the involvement of young people in governance. Youths must have concrete roles in budget tracking, community policing boards and school planning, and should go beyond mere representation. Although initiatives like the 'Not Too Young to Run Act' (2018) have provided opportunities, but youth penetration into power bollocks remains limited by structural barriers. It therefore becomes imperative for inclusion of youth voice in policies affecting them through reform of leadership.

Finally, technocratic implementation and innovation must be enforced towards enhancing leadership accountability and youthfulness. The information dissemination about community initiatives should be implemented, and online platforms should be employed as tools of transparent information sharing. In addition, a technology hub and competence centers are expected to help shift the aspirations of young individuals interested in cybercrime towards entrepreneurship and innovations. Leadership reform in Nigeria should be holistic, solving structural, cultural, and institutional gaps. This kind of reform plays a crucial role in deterring entrenchment of deviancy within the socio-political scene of Nigeria through empowering local leadership, empowering national institutions, and rapid youth development.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the development of deviant subcultures in Nigeria is not just a mere law-enforcement considerations; it is, instead, an important consequence of a severe leadership deficit. Filling leadership gaps at all levels of social hierarchies is necessary since such deviant subcultures can otherwise acquire enough momentum to act as alternative authorities in situations of weak governance. In this light, this paper therefore underscores the reality that the escalation of deviant subcultures in Nigeria is deeply rooted in pervasive leadership crises at community and national levels. It becomes clear that leadership failures in the form of corruption, political patronage, poorly developed institutions, and endemic lack of accountability have created an enabling environment in which deviant networks have developed and

often assume roles traditionally reserved for formal governance structures.

The disillusionment of Nigerian youths with state institutions, religious institutions, and traditional leadership signifies a severe crisis with regards to legitimacy as well as trust. As such, this void has been politically capitalized on by deviant subcultures, who offer alternate routes of identity construction, economic provision, and social affirmation. In addition, this study identifies that institutions failure most especially in police agencies, court systems, and educational institutions escalates this dilemma. Corruption and complicity in security institutions deter membership engagement and embolden deviant actors. Moreover, the role of family, religious, and community leaders is equally complex; while these groups hold potential as moral anchors, their declining influence. While such institutions can potentially act as moral authorities, lack of influence, political interference, and erosion in credibility have limited such institutions to curb deviant activity (Olowojolu, et al., 2019, Fawole, et al., 2020, Ezemenaka, 2021, Gadau, & Malami, 2022)

Ultimately, addressing the spread of deviant subcultures requires more than reactive policing; it demands transformational leadership that prioritizes ethical governance, social inclusion, youth empowerment, and institutional reform. Radical interventions aimed at disrupting deviance cycles encompass strengthening grassroots leadership, rebuilding accountability through transparency mechanisms, and increasing youth engagement in decision-making processes. In addition, the incorporation of technology, civics training, and interventions based on religious values can effectively complement policy initiatives aimed at changing societal values. Without a core ideological shift in leadership paradigms challenging structural inequalities with a view towards rebuilding public trusts, deviant subcultures will likely endure as alternative survival modes and resistance systems. Therefore, sustainable solutions need to combine governance reform with community engagement to build a resilient, inclusive, and secure society in Nigeria.

Recommendations
Promotion of Ethical and Inclusive Leadership at All Levels: Nigeria must prioritize leadership reform with transparency, accountability, and merit-based selections across both community and national levels of governance. Leadership integrity is necessary to restore confidence among citizens, manage structural corruption, and reduce drivers of deviant subculture emergence.

Strengthen Institutional Capacity and Law Enforcement Accountability: There is a need to enhance law enforcement agencies and courts of law with effective implementations of anti-corruption measures, better training initiatives, and enhanced provision of welfare assistance among police officers. These can help promote the establishment of effective monitoring systems and community-based policing strategies designed to encourage civilian engagement, enhance reporting of events, and reduce the collusion responsible for fuelling crimes.

Empowerment of Grassroots and Community Leadership Structures: Local leaders, including traditional rulers and religious institutions, should be equipped with resources and training to engage youth constructively. Community-based programs that strengthen moral guidance, conflict resolution, and youth mentoring will help bridge the gap between formal governance and local realities, addressing vulnerabilities that deviant networks exploit.

Expansion of Youth Development and Economic Empowerment Initiatives: Sustainable youth-focused policies must address unemployment, education gaps, and skill acquisition. Programs should be designed with direct input from young people to ensure relevance and ownership. Practical interventions such as entrepreneurship training, digital literacy, and civic education can redirect youth energies toward productive engagement.

Encouraging Cooperation between Varying Stakeholders and Cultural Change: An overhaul of values at large requires engagement of civil society, religious groups, schools, and family units in societal norm change. National campaigns promoting integrity, deterring sentimentalism of deviance, and fostering civic duty could invoke shifts in societal opinion. In addition, community dialogue and interfaith initiatives can bolster mutual resistance towards deviant subcultures.

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